

Monitoring Italy 2009: *Measuring the Progress of Italian Society*

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Discussing strengths and weaknesses of a country is particularly important in times characterised by such a severe economic crises as those we are in today: this is in fact the moment to appropriately design policies intended to pave the way for the next recovery. With these considerations in mind, ISAE, the OECD and the Rivista di Politica Economica organised the Monitoring Italy 2009 Conference, held in Rome at the beginning of last June, in the framework of the OECD Global Project on “Measuring the Progress of Societies”. The Conference was attended by over a hundred experts, presenting papers and discussing ideas about the level of progress reached by the Italian society. Indeed, as testified by the OECD Global Project, in the last few years, research on the correct measurement of societal well being has intensified, as well as the policy debate on these issues.

From the point of view of the researcher, the Conference stressed the importance of developing a new set of indicators, measuring aspects of well being that are not considered in standard National Accounts: a number of contributions were presented on the measurement of the impact of public intervention, as well as of that of growing inequalities, on public welfare. As suggested by Sir Anthony Atkinson in his opening lecture, filling these gaps is particularly important for the producer of official statistics, that appear to suffer nowadays of a misperception of his role: the results of a special ISAE /OECD survey – also presented and discussed at the Conference – have indeed shown that a remarkable share of Italian population is not aware of the basic economic statistics such as those on GDP, inflation and unemployment. A possible interpretation of this evidence is that it signals a growing discrepancy between aggregate official data – and the way they are communicated to the public – and the everyday experience of the individuals.

From the political standpoint, the Istanbul Declaration, signed by many international organisation in 2007, has been followed by the statements released at the “Beyond GDP” Conference by the President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, and by the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Potterling, as well as by the renewed interest of President Obama in the concept of “progress”, and finally, by the launch of the “Stiglitz

Commission” by President Sarkozy. In this respect, at the end of the Monitoring Italy Conference, the President of the National Council for Economy and Labour (CNEL), Prof. Antonio Marzano, in a letter sent to the President of ISAE, Prof. Alberto Majocchi, proposed to Italian institutions such as ISAE, ISTAT, the Bank of Italy and others to collaborate with CNEL in establishing a “roundtable on societal progress”. This roundtable would have three main goals: defining the most important dimensions of progress from the Italian society’s point of view, selecting a set of key indicators able to measure the well being of Italian society and promoting an initiative for correctly informing Italian citizens on the results, possibly developing a close collaboration with relevant media partners. Prof. Majocchi and the representatives of other institutions declared their interest in the proposal and the Conference was closed with the idea of preparing a follow-up session on these themes, possibly with OECD collaboration, to be held at CNEL in the coming months.